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CONTENTS

PAGE

A Whispering Hope.....Dorothy Gay White 4

To My Sailor Brother.....Peggy Jane Warren 5

Youth's Dreams.....Bobbie Dantzler 6

Home Again.....Mary Lou Pressly 7

After The Rain.....Peggy Brown 7

The Storm.....Ann Louisa Williams 8

Surprises.....Peggy Jane Warren 9

Happiness.....Peggy Jane Warren 9

Ye Olde English.....Eunice Taylor 10

The Bad Day.....Mary Bates Sherwood 11

Memories.....Peggy Brown 12

Fog.....Gretchen White 12

Double Decision.....Annaionette Bobbitt 12

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A Whispering Hope

The glowing sun threw its golden ray through the towering oaks that bordered Duke of Gloucester Street and along the Capitol Square which mirrored the rich tradition of the sprawling College of William and Mary.

The street was quiet, except for an occasional passing automobile, and with all its beauty seemed to await the still calmness of the evening twilight. Yet from her window seat Diane could see no beauty nor hear a note from the song of the cardinal perched on the branch of a nearby tree. She saw only, through tear-stained eyes, a telegram from the War Department and the words that stood out with fiery brilliance: "We regret to inform you—Your husband—Missing in action!"

Could there be so much sorrow in one small corner that had once held so much joy? Could there never be real life again, sunshine through the clouds, a smile, a tender touch from one whose love had meant so much? As the door opened, Diane looked up to see her Grandmother enter the room and come to sit beside her on the window seat.

After a seeming age of silence the old lady spoke. "Wars are numerous, my dear, great are their cost. So few have not suffered. You suffer now as I did once years ago.

"I once stood at this same window looking out at this same street. It was different then; the oaks weren't so large and there were no pavements. Of course, the Capitol and the College were where they are now, but the College was smaller. The Civil War had been over several weeks and since the news the weary men from our beaten armies had been passing, making their way to Richmond, to James Town, to Yorktown and places beyond.

"I had been watching them and thinking about your grandfather. You see, my dear, I too had received a message in a letter from one of Jim's friends. He had never returned from one of the fierce charges at Petersburg. I was stunned by the news, but for some unfounded reason I didn't believe it was true. There had been many mistakes, and in those days of slow and uncertain transportation, it wasn't surprising that I hadn't heard from him. I felt that he was alive and no one could convince me that I was wrong. I had hope. However, months passed and I heard no word. I began to believe that he must indeed be dead. When I began to lose hope, I lost everything. Then, one day, just before the twilight glow, I stood at this very window looking forlornly out into the crowded and dusty street and as I watched a figure detached itself from the dusty mass, and as the movement caught my eye, my heart leaped into my throat. I sprang up, gathering my skirts as I ran down the stairs and into the hall, out into the dusty street. Lest I should be wrong, I stopped and peered through the darkening shadows at him, while he stared at me a moment and then took me fiercely into his arms. I still remember that I could not breathe, but I didn't care. Jim was home! Jim was alive and I was in his arms at last!

"I don't need to tell you that we had a long and happy life together; I do need to tell you that you should never stop hoping, for miracles of which we never dream are possible for individuals, even in our modern world.

"As long as there is hope,
There's yet so much;
A comforting thought,
The reality of such.
A brighter look at tomorrow,
A whispering hope to shield one's sorrow.

A world of cruelty, its splendor still,
  Each grievous heart, hope shall fill;
Hasten thou will, oh, God, we pray,
  When there shall come a peaceful day.
And gone with the wind, each heavy heart;
  When lovers unite, to never part."

DOROTHY GAY WHITE

To My Sailor Brother

Tonight I looked upon the sky and
  wished upon a star;
Tonight I saw a crescent moon and
  wondered where you are.
They're 'possum hunting now at home
  I hear the canine cry;
The swift wings of my mind and soul
  are ever wont to fly,
Where once we raced in headlong
  flight with laughter and with song
The way from childhood was so short;
  the journey back too long.
Perhaps the moon on which I gaze
  will kiss you once for me,
Perhaps your heart will beat with
  mine, across the pulsing sea.
My brother, I can hear your voice in
  motor cavalcades
Those rumbling instruments of war
  in dun-colored parade.
I hear you in the thunder of those
  winged birds of steel
That fly through darkness overhead
  'cross wood and town and field.
The sky reminds me of your face
  where clouds would sometimes frown.
I think upon the hunts we took, the
  muscadines we found.
Remember how the leaves would scrunch
  when trod by awkward feet?
Remember how the chinquapins were
  crisp and white and sweet?
Tonight my soul has but to step from
  here to there and stay
A moment, for the soul can wing two
  thousand miles away.

It can't be too much longer now. I
feel it in my heart;
When those will be together, who
have too long been apart.
So think that my soul is there,
though lightly it hath trod.
Goodnight to thee, dear brother,
and remember me and God.

PEGGY JANE WARREN

Youth's Dreams

I face each day steadfastly
Although life's not what it seems.
It's hurts and fears, I crush them
And lock myself within my dreams.

Hate shall not tear the filmy haze,
The precious life of them apart;
When love has shed its bitter tear,
I'll have the dreams left in my heart.

When hope is gone, or faith has failed,
The ashe of youth is cold and grey,
From out despair I'll take my dreams
To brush the pallid ashe away.

Life's ways are dark;
She brings temptations dreadful to behold.
My dreams are all that keep me
From growing hard as I grow old.

Then let life come—I'll battle.
I've forged steel to case my heart.
For none of life's harsh trials
Shall tear my shining dreams apart.

When passing age comes forth to seek,
And reach its phantom hands my way,
I'll relive all my precious dreams
That live from glowing yesterday.

But now while youth is in my breast,
I know that life has rainbow gleams;
For faith and love have touched my heart,
The future time will hold my dreams.

BOBBIE DANTZLER

Home Again

He had fought for all he was worth and at last he had secured a short leave. His head felt light with no leaves sprouting from his hat. He hoped the family would be pleased to see him. As he covered the last block of the seemingly long way home, he began to wonder if Mom would be there—he hoped so—he would know that home was real when he saw Mom and smelled dinner cooking in the kitchen. Would there be any of his favorite cookies in the cooky jar—his mind just couldn't forget food. Although he kept thinking of the battle and of the friends who had been able to go home before. It took real courage to refrain from running those last few steps, but his bad leg wouldn't allow that.

Flinging open the door, he called out, "Hey, is anybody home?" His mother rushed out from the kitchen and seeing the uniform picked him up in her arms and hugged him—her five-year-old son home from playing war with his friends on the corner lot. His bad leg was a souvenir of a fall on the "battle-ground," now forgotten in the warmth of his Mom's close embrace.

Mary Lou Pressly

After The Rain

The Divine Artist painted a picture
On a canvas of misty blue.
He put in some clouds for a border
And added a golden hue.

To one side He placed the rainbow,
Blending colors with great pain,
And this completed the picture
Of the sky after a rain.

Peggy Brown

The Storm

High winds a-calling with cries appalling
Came before the breaking storm.
A hunter weary, with everything dreary,
Longs for the approaching morn.

Storm clouds piling, boiling, riling,
The tempestuous storm does break.
Trees are sighing, winds are crying
Far across the cold-blue lake.

The winds dash on with bursts of passion
All around the hills and vales.
Brooding and sinister, softer, louder.
They cry in convulsive wails.

Still more madly, sobbing sadly,
The winds rush out from the depths.
The struggling hunter, seeking shelter,
Makes his way with wavering steps.

The hunter gropes, with falling hopes
The faint trail is lost from sight
With no stars to guide, no shelter to hide,
He struggles on through the night.

Sudden stillness, with all quietness
The heighth of the storm is spent.
All is serene; all is swept clean,
With morn the storm clouds went.

The hunter is weary, but nothing is dreary
The furious winds have gone.
Home is now near him, with fireside to cheer him
Peace has returned with the dawn.

Ann Louisa Williams

Surprises

Were you ever surprised by a sunset?
Were you ever amazed by a dawn?
Did you ever exclaim at a grassy plain
Or laugh in delight at a fawn?

Did you ever look at a twilight sky
Expecting just velvet night
And see at the edge, a glorious wedge
Of soft gold and crimson light?

Did you ever look at a cumulus cloud
At its intricate fluffy bars?
Or gaze at the sky and wonder how high
Heaven could be from the stars?

Did you ever walk with the world alone
See how insignificant
How after all, you are very small
And your life will soon be spent?

Did you ever feel very close to God?
I did on an April day,
'Neath an April sky, my God and I
And the wind from across the bay.

PEGGY JANE WARREN

Happiness

Sometimes a strain of music can
fulfill a heart's desire.
Sometimes the joy of living can
set a soul afire.
A thousand little daily joys can
make our hearts rejoice.
A laughing brook, the whispering trees
a robin's lilting voice.

PEGGY JANE WARREN

Ye Olde English

I traveled through France
upon steeds of white
And galloped through Britain
with Gawain the Knight,
Fought the battles of
such men as
Ralph the Collier and good Gamelyn.

Chaucer and I have
lots of chats
About the Pardoner's Tale
and just this and that.
Shakespeare also is
a very good friend
While Milton is one
of my poetic kin.

Gosh, but I'm tired of
this roaming about.
Without some rest you
can wear yourself out.
So I'll gather my armor,
tie my steed for the knight,
Close my book and
turn out the light. (click)

EUNICE TAYLOR

The Bad Day

The grey sky hung like a heavy tent over the world that January day. The air was as cold as the proverbial tomb, and the snow had frozen into a layer of ice that was too slick to even walk on.

Only a child could have loved such a day; and a child did. His name was Mike, and Mike had never seen such a world. Everything looked different with the strange covering of ice; and the icicles hanging from every roof made the houses like great cakes with white icing dripping from the edges.

With the eagerness that only children have, Mike had wanted, all day, to go out into this magical world; but it was only after his afternoon nap that his mother let him go. He walked out upon the porch and stopped in breathless wonder before he carefully picked his way down the slick steps and into the yard. Reaching for an icicle that he longed to taste, he found that most of them were too high for a four-year-old to touch; but there was one big one on a bush just low enough for him to reach. At the touch of his fingers, it fell and its shattering upon the ice frightened him. He ran away but soon crept back and saw the strange thing lying on the ground. He rolled it over with his foot; and when it made no responsive move, he picked it up. He licked it with his small, hot tongue in the hope that it would be sweet, but it only tasted cold!

He immediately forgot his disappointment as a car with chains on the wheels came down the street with such a clatter that the silence of the afternoon was shattered just as the icicle had shattered in its fall to the ground. Mike went to the curb and saw that the ruts in the snow were frozen solid. He wanted to touch them but his mother's frequent admonitions against leaving the yard prompted him not to go into the street.

The plaintive mew of a little kitten startled him as he turned back into the yard. Beneath the shrub by the corner of the porch, he saw a little round ball of fur from which almost human cries for help were emitting. Picking the soft bundle up gently, he tried to comfort it. Just then he saw a big cat come around the corner of the house. He put the kitten down and watched the mother as she took her baby in her mouth by the nape of the neck and carried it down the drive. Mike knew that she was taking it home, and he was glad.

The snow which had been threatening all day suddenly began to fall. Mike tried to catch the flakes in his mittens, but each flake disappeared as he touched it. As he stood there frozen into statue-like silence as he watched the grey world change into white fairyland, his mother spoke to him and recalled him from his fairyland dream world.

While his mother removed his wet coat, she and his father talked about the bad weather and the comforts of staying in. They, in their adult world, had forgotten that in the land of childhood, an outdoors covered in ice and snow is a fairyland of surprises, full of inexplicable magic.

Mary Bates Sherwood

Memories

Ah, memories that by a dim firelight
Are brought to cheer a lonely night;
Thoughts out of the past remembered again
Of a word or a smile always to remain
In your memory.

A fleeting glance into days gone by,
If only the sparkle in a child's eyes.
Or the smell of a crisp spring day,
Or a strain of music heard on your way—
It's a memory.

PEGGY BROWN

Fog

There has been a fog lately.
To some
A cold wet mist that goes
to their bones and makes
them shiver
As if they were getting old.
To me
A mysterious deep quietness,
A cold grey veil that softens
the sharp corners of buildings
Carrying me to a dream world
all my own.

GRETCHEN WHITE

Double Decision

The shabby young woman coming out of the old-fashioned boarding house looked cautiously up and down the street before she slipped into the throng of people and began walking quickly along. She was not the sort who would stand out in a crowd, yet people soon began looking at her strangely. Her eyes were wild and frightened, and her face seemed to be held forcibly in its immobile pattern of calmness. The young woman immediately noticed the curious looks and, at the next crossing, turned and stumblingly ran down a smaller side street. As she ran along voices seemed to scream at her from all directions; there was a rushing noise in her head. She ran faster and faster and then, on the outskirts of the city, forced herself to slow down and think calmly.

No one would ever suspect her—it looked like an accident. She had thought and planned every little detail and she knew that she hadn't left any careless evidence. There'd been no clumsy bungling like fingerprints.

Oh, but that expression on his face—she'd never forget it! It was heartbreaking, that look. The bewildered look of protest of an innocent child who is being wrongly punished.

Milly Baldwin determinedly steeled herself against such thoughts and to herself tried to justify her actions. The old man had irritated her for years. He was from the same dull little town as she; and when she'd come to the city, he'd been a constant reminder that she was little Milly Baldwin from the wrong side of the tracks who had always been thought a little queer. He had seemed to feel that somehow she was his responsibility and through his help, she had been able to get a job in one of the leading jewelry shops. When she had been accused of stealing several small pieces of expensive jewelry it had been his testimony that had freed her. He was only the night watchman in one of the defense plants, but everyone knew and loved old Pop.

After that, however, Pop seemed to watch every move she made. He moved to the boarding house where she lived and seemed to love just talking to her of her good Christian parents and how sweet she had looked when she used to sing in the choir. She knew how she'd looked, though, well enough. All the other little girls had been dressed nicely with matching bow ribbons and socks—but she! Her people were poor and there had been no money for frills for her. She'd looked like a ragged little beggar who'd wandered in by mistake, and so Milly thought that old Pop was making fun of her.

When she finally found the nerve to go away for the week-end and pawn the stolen jewelry, she felt that in some mysterious way he knew; and after that, when she began buying new clothes and getting her hair fixed in the latest styles, his tired old face seemed to be gently accusing but forgiving. She felt he was making excuses for her and that only made her more furious. If only he'd come out in the open with it; but no, he just smiled and spoke kindly to her when he caught her staring at him.

Then last week it had got so bad that when she went to bed the room seemed to be filled with a million masks of Pop's lined old face. No matter how much she turned and twisted, they were still there. Some were smiling, some accusing, and others just *looked* at her. Then they began to laugh in a high shrill old voice and one of the faces got larger and larger and finally spoke. It said in a cracked, old voice, "Yes, Milly, my dear, I know all about you—but I won't tell. It would hurt your parents too much. Just don't go too far, Milly, not too far!"

As the words ended in a terrifying laugh, Milly sat up and pressed her hands madly to her head. Then, in desperate frenzy, she snapped on the light. The faces vanished as the hard clean light flooded the room, but the echo of that voice remained. Milly was shaking all over and perspiration stood out on her face. Suddenly, what she had to do came to her so simply and clearly that she wondered at her stupidity in not thinking of it sooner. She planned it out carefully and waited until what seemed the perfect moment.

She waited until one dreary afternoon when she knew he was in his room and most of the guests were out. She walked steadily down the dingy little hall to his room and, after a moment, knocked on the door. He'd said, "Come in"; and then, seeing her, "Why, come in, child! I've been wanting to talk to you. Sit down, my dear. Why, Milly, what's wrong—why do you look so strange? Aren't you well?"

His mouth opened and that bewildered expression of innocence came over his face before her hand with the heavy blunt book-end hit his skull. He fell backward with a tired little sigh and she wiped the book-end carefully and placed it back on the table. She turned his chair over and put his head near the edge of the table. It looked as though he'd stumbled, knocked the chair over, and hit his head on the table.

With not even one backward look Milly had left the house and gone out into the street.

She didn't know where she was going or what she was going to do, but she knew she had to get away. She would go so far that she'd forget all about it.

Then, quite suddenly she stopped pretending. She knew she'd never get that far away; so just as simply and quickly as before, she made the last decision she was ever to make. She knew she couldn't go back to the boarding house, couldn't face the life of uncertainty and fear that would be hers if she kept on going. To her dazed mind there seemed only one solution, and so she turned around and resolutely began retracing her steps to the very top of the cliff that led into the city. She wanted to go to the very highest point so there could be no possibility that anything would go wrong. As soon as she had definitely decided, she felt queerly more relaxed than she had in weeks. She wanted to get it over quickly; so she lifted her shoulders, threw back her head, and walked briskly toward the top of the cliff.

Annaionette Bobbitt